DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 639 FL 007 015

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TITLE Rhetorical Competence: Queries and Questions.
PUB DATE 17 May 75
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the North Central Regional Linguistics Conference (Univ. of Minnesota, May 16-17, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Deep Structure; *Language Ability; Language Usage; *Linguistic Competence; *Linguistic Performance; *Linguistic Theory; Native Speakers; Oral Communication; Transformation Generative Grammar
IDENTIFIERS Illocutionary Force; Performative Analysis; *Rhetorical Competence

ABSTRACT

A native speaker of a language possesses both grammatical and rhetorical competence. A grammatical model, in its deep structure, represents an "is a" relationship. It seeks to offer some explanation of a human being as a human being. A rhetorical model represents a "counts as" relationship. It seeks to offer some explanation of a human being as a social animal. Linguistic models, such as the performative analysis, that attempt to integrate illocutionary force into a grammar are ill-conceived. An illocutionary act must be context-oriented. A rhetoric relates illocutionary force and context. That is, a particular chunk of linguistic material (generated by the grammar, without orientation to context) counts as a particular illocutionary act (the actualization of an illocutionary force) in a particular context. Queries, a rhetorical concept, underlain by basic assumptions or sincerity conditions (Austin's proper thoughts and feelings), and questions, a grammatical concept, provide interesting examples of and insights into incongruities resulting from the nexus of grammatical and rhetorical competence. (Author)

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RHETORICAL COMPETENCE: QUERIES AND QUESTIONS

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North Central Regional Linguistics Conference

University of Minnesota

May 16-17, 1975

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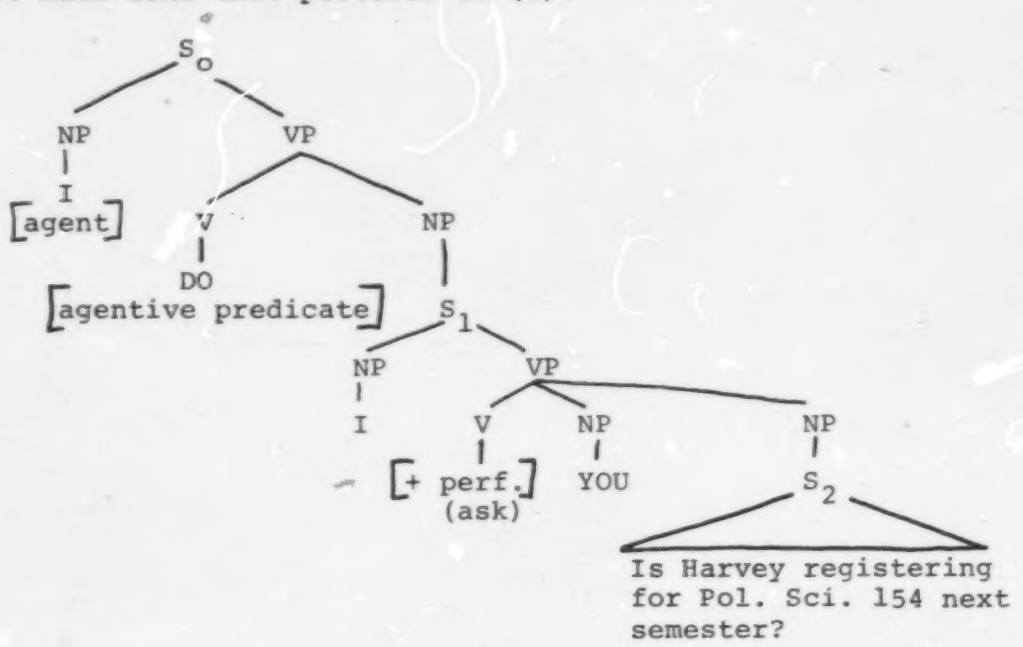
For the past several years both linguists and philosophers of language have increasingly directed their attention to the question of how the illocutionary act--the act of doing something *in* saying something--was related to, and was to be worked into (or out of) a grammatical description. One avenue of approach is the so-called Performative Analysis. Ross (1970), for example, proposed that underlying every declarative sentence in English was a higher sentence of the form 'I hereby declare to you,' which in most instances would subsequently be deleted transformationally. Perhaps the most comprehensive and detailed examination of the performative analysis presented to date is Sadock (1974), *Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts*. According to Sadock, a sentence such as

(1) Is Harvey registering for Pol. Sci. 154 next semester?

will have at its deepest, or most abstract semantical level, a structure much like that pictured in (2).

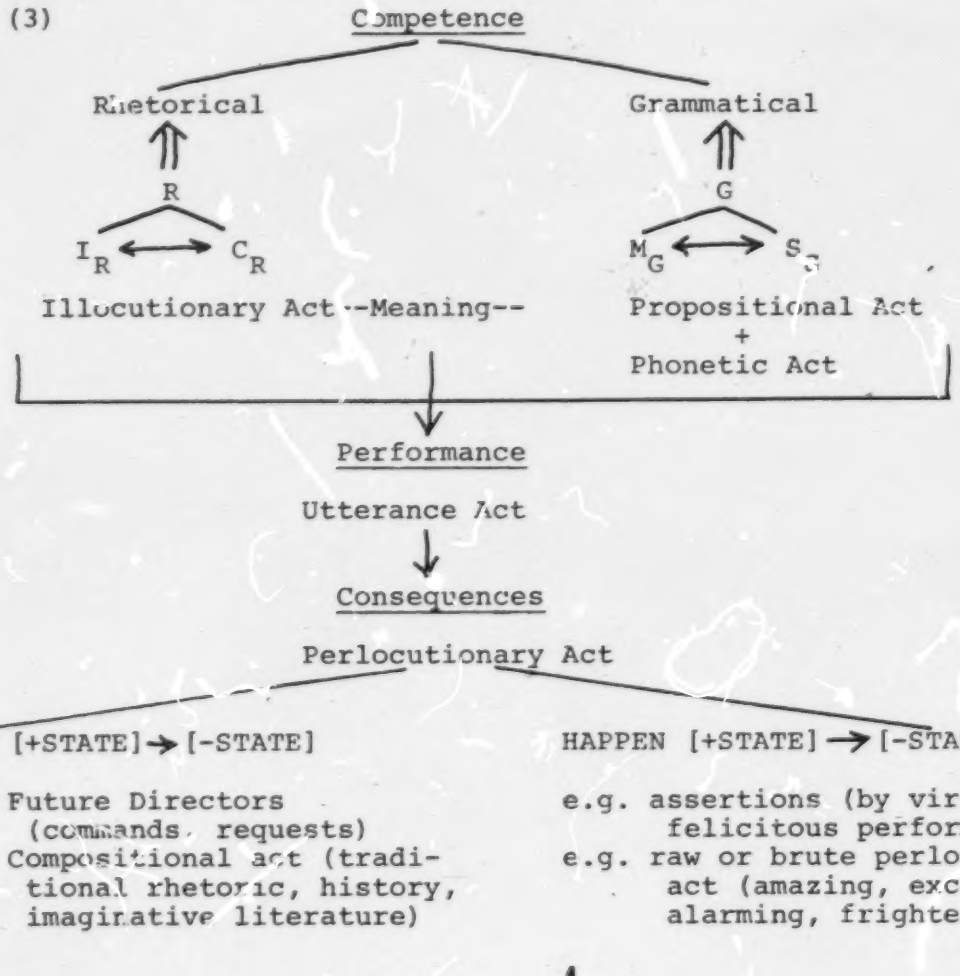
(2)



The speech act value of the performative verb (ask) is incorporated in the highest clause (S_1) which is the object of the agentive predicate, DO (Sadock, 1974:69-71). For this analysis, Sadock offers extensive, and very convincing evidence based primarily upon cooccurence properties, grammatical properties, and paraphrase properties for determining "which aspects of the pragmatics of a sentence are to be directly represented in semantic structure" (Sadock, 1974:97).

This paper will consider an alternative linguistic model to account for the competence of a native speaker of a language, a model where illocutionary acts are not incorporated in the grammar.

(3)



This model underscores the fact that a native speaker of a language possesses a dual or two-pronged linguistic competence: (a) knowledge of a language, and (b) knowledge of how to use a language. A linguistic model must represent both of these competences. Underlying (a) is grammatical competence; underlying (b) is rhetorical competence. Competence underlies performance, the utterance act--the actual sentence token. Performance leads to the consequences of the speech act, the perlocutionary act--the effects of the speaker's act upon the speaker and/or his addressee(s).

It is both necessary and convenient that a linguistic grammar, a model of grammatical competence, be an abstraction, a context free study of the system of a language. A linguistic grammar basically represents in its deep structure, by means of a branching tree phrase marker, an IS A relationship, i.e.,

(4) (SM) NP AUX VP is a S.

In reality, a grammatical model seeks to offer some explanation of a human being as a human being. Language is rule governed, intentional behavior. Language is a device to relate meaning and sound, to relate a propositional act and a phonetic act. Uttered solely as a linguistic example, with no reference at all to any context or situational orientation,

(5) Issac aimed his blow-gun at the pterodactyl

means something, and has a structured sound sequence. It means something because the formatives or morphemes have real world meaning.

Language is a communicative tool. Language exists in the real world as something to do something with. A linguistic

rhetoric, a model of rhetorical competence--the native speaker's knowledge of how to use language--must be context oriented. A linguistic rhetoric represents basically a COUNTS AS relationship,

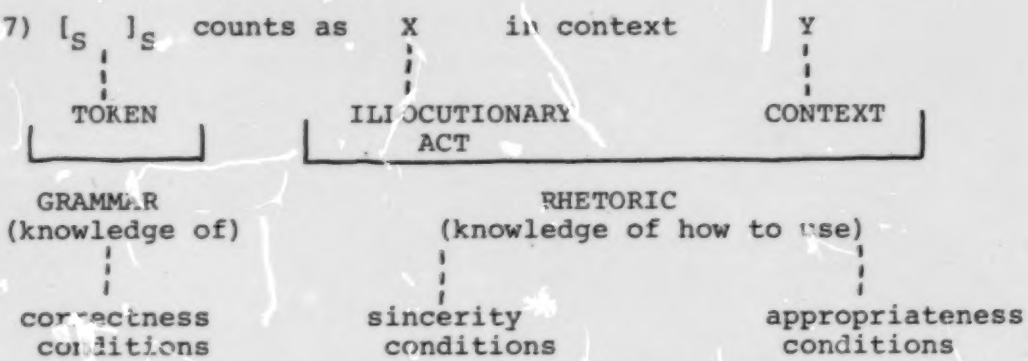
(6) $[_S\ ]_S$ counts as X in context Y.

This relationship is basically Searle's essential rule underlying each illocutionary act, the use of speech as action: the speaker intends that his addressee understand (and this is the illocutionary effect) that a particular chunk of linguistic material, $[_S\ ]_S$, counts as a particular illocutionary act, X, in a particular appropriate context, Y. This approach seeks to offer some explanation of a human being as a social animal.

Rhetoric is the native speaker's competence in using illocutionary force by relating grammar, the abstraction, the language system, and context, the non-abstraction, the real world. Since rhetoric is viewed in this model (3) as supplying meaning to a sentence token through the congruence of illocutionary force and context, it must necessarily incorporate a full theory of deixis--any and all aspects of the speech act that help anchor or orient that act to the real world.

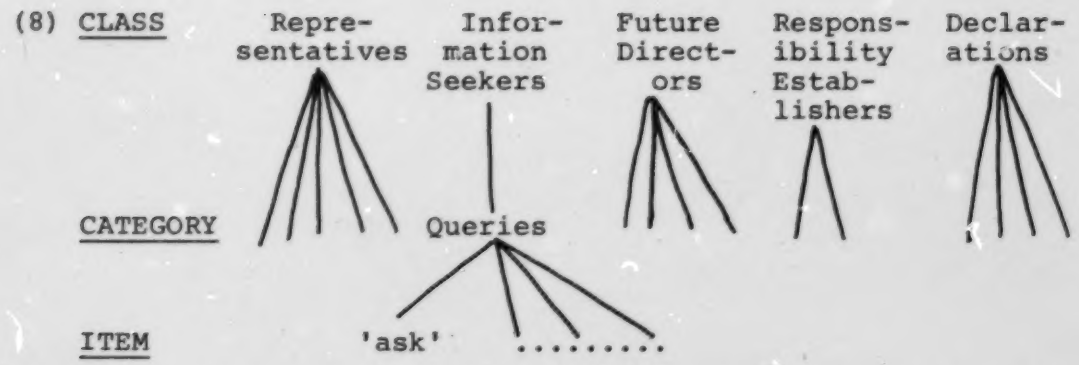
Underscoring $[_S\ ]_S$ are the notions of correctness and completeness, conflated here simply into correctness conditions. This, of course, is what the grammarian is properly interested in studying. Violations of the correctness conditions result in misfires; the act is vitiated. (The terms employed are J. L. Austin's.) Underlying context Y is the notion of appropriateness. Violations of the appropriateness conditions result in misinvocations; the act is disallowed. And underscoring X, the illocutionary

act, is the notion of sincerity, Austin's proper thoughts and feelings. Violations of the sincerity conditions result in abuses; the act is allowed, but hollow. Human beings can lie. The illocutionary act is the contextual and grammatical realization of an illocutionary force. A speaker possesses knowledge of how to perform felicitous (and hence, infelicitous) illocutionary acts. As an addressee, he possesses knowledge of how to individuate illocutionary acts, i.e., how to establish and understand the illocutionary force in an illocutionary act. Diagrammatically,



The felicitous realization of an illocutionary force as an illocutionary act is dependent upon basic assumptions underlying the sincerity conditions for the use of each illocutionary force. Searle, in an unpublished 1973 paper (delivered, I believe, at the University of Minnesota) points out that there are a limited number of basic things that people do with language when they use speech as action, when they do something in saying something. (8), with its indebtedness to both J. Searle and R. Ohmann, represents a hierarchical taxonomy of illocutionary forces:

(8)



Basically, Representatives represent the world as it is; Information Seekers seek information about the way the world is; Future Directors aim at directing future action, changing the way the world is; Responsibility Establishers establish who or what is responsible for the way the world is; and Declarations declare a change in the world as it is. Each major class branches into one or more categories, with each category then branching into individual items--specific illocutionary forces.

What are the proper thoughts and feelings that a speaker must have in order to use language to seek information sincerely, to perform, for example, the illocutionary act of 'asking'? Given $[_S\ ]_S$ and context Y, a speaker must possess at least the basic underlying assumptions satisfying the sincerity conditions as given in (9):

(9) (a) [+ I, -KNOW]

(b) [+ I, +WANT]

(c) [+ YOU, +KNOW]

(d) [+ YOU, +CAUSE [+I, +KNOW]]

Searle (1969:69) asks whether certain kinds of illocutionary acts are really special cases of other kinds of illocutionary acts.

That is, should 'ask' be decomposed into an act of 'stating' (I do not know this body of information) plus an act of 'requesting' (please supply me with this body of information)? With Information Seekers (or, Queries, since this is the sole category of Information Seekers) all four basic underlying assumptions, (a)-(d), are relevant. (a), for example, is not the illocutionary force of 'stating'; it is one of the necessary assumptions for sincere queries. (d), in this particular configuration of assumptions, is not the illocutionary force of 'requesting'; it likewise is one of the necessary assumptions underlying sincere queries.

The speaker, through knowing how to use language, seeks to relate himself and his addressee in a particular temporal, spatial, and social situation or discourse, to his knowledge of this world as he perceives it. Seeking information--querying--is one of the uses a human being makes of language to relate himself to his real world.

Questions are the grammatical realizations of a deep structure containing a Q formative, a formative that will trigger off certain, specified transformational processes. Queries are the sole category of those contextual realizations or illocutionary acts which seek information. Because the native speaker possesses both grammatical and rhetorical competence, it is obvious to anyone that not all questions are queries.

Let us look very briefly at eight grammatical questions, with their contexts given (as indicated by the type of question in parentheses). Thus, these are not to be viewed as isolated

linguistic examples given sine situ.

(10) (examination question)
What is the capital of Peru?

(11) (rhetorical question)
How could Ruth ever be so ruthless?

(12) (phatic communion question)
How are you today?

(13) (assertive tag question)
Rome wasn't built in a day, was it?

(14) (echo question)
Beauregard is going to the BEACH?

(15) (request question)
Could you pass the salt?

(16) (suggestion question)
Must you do that now? (Frazer, 1971:12ii)

(17) (non-sequitur question)
Is the Pope Catholic? (Sadock, 1974:138 (156))

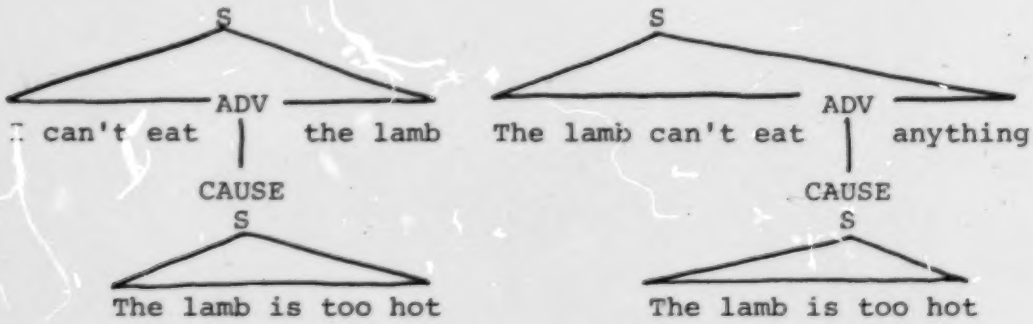
Given the specified contexts, the real or underlying body of information sought, as opposed to the superficial (semantically referential) body of information sought by the grammatical question, is either different or non-existent, leading thereby to the violation of one or more of the basic assumptions underlying rhetorical queries.

Without the specified context, (10)-(17) would of course exhibit force multiplicity. Each token could conceivably (and sometimes not so conceivably) be understood to count as a sincere query. Why not simply incorporate the illocutionary force of a sentence token, then, as part of the grammatical meaning of the sentence, as with the performative analysis? Ambiguity often evaporates when context is specified. For example, in

(18) The lamb is too hot to eat

the sentence token is no longer ambiguous when known to be uttered at the evening dinner table when the main entree is roast lamb. But, the ambiguity of (18) can be shown by reference to two distinct deep structures:

(19)

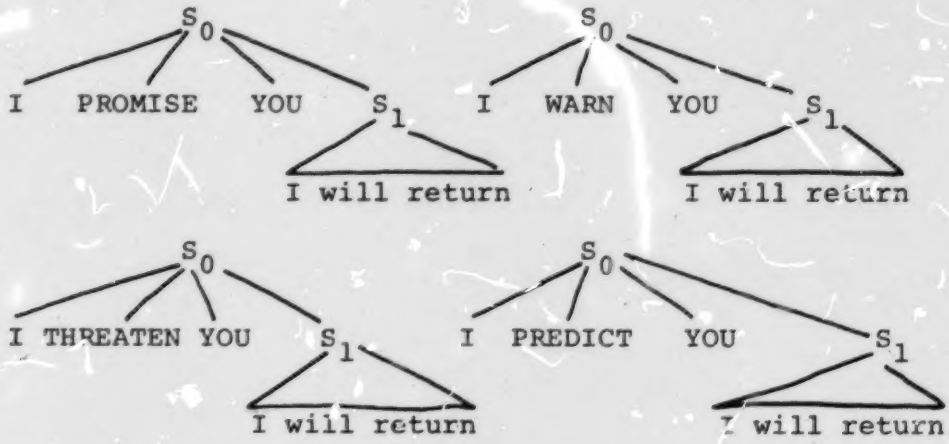


And, these two distinct deep structures can be shown even without reference to context. Force multiplicity also evaporates in a context, but only in a context. Remember that an illocutionary act is the contextual realization of an illocutionary force. It is not the grammar that 'disambiguates' or 'deforcemultiplicates'

(20) I promise to return,

but the rhetoric. It is a circular argument to posit four or more distinct abstract deep structures as in (21) without reference to a specified contextual orientation:

(21)



Ambiguity is a grammatical concept. Force multiplicity is a rhetorical concept.

Further, consider

(22) Smith: Who is a current Black linguist?

Jones: Orlando Taylor.

Jones is performing two distinct illocutionary acts: he is 'responding' to Smith's query, i.e., the chunk of linguistic material, 'Orlando Taylor,' counts as a response in this context (here is your answer); and secondly, he is 'asking for information' from Smith, i.e., this chunk of linguistic material counts as a query in this context (have you ever heard of him?). The problem is not with language, but with a performative analysis model which insists that a single, unambiguous speech act value be assigned to the highest clause that is the object of the agentive predicate DO. Language is perfectly capable of employing, in a particular context, the same chunk of linguistic material to register two, or more, illocutionary acts simultaneously. Sentence tokens such as:

(23) I regret that I must inform you that you are hereby dismissed

pose serious problems only when one attempts to stuff everything linguistic into grammatical competence while disregarding rhetorical (pragmatic, situational) competence. One can find many instances of $[_S\ ]_S$ counting as X_1 and X_2 (and possibly more) in context Y, in literature, especially poetry.

In Young, Becker, and Pike, Rhetoric: Discovery and Change (1970), pages 317-18, is quoted the following example of schizophrenic speech:

(24) You go out and stand pat--pat, you hear! Who was Pat? What does he wear when he's in Ireland? This hair won't stay out of my eyes. See this pillow? Now is it even, even or odd? Even or odd, by God: I take it even, by God. By God we live, by God we die, and that's my allegiance to these United States. See my little eagle?...

As the terms grammatical and rhetorical competence have been used in this paper, one would be hard pressed to call the sentence tokens in (24) ungrammatical. But, one would be equally hard pressed to call the sentence tokens rhetorical. Could any illocutionary acts be seriously claimed to have been felicitously (or even infelicitously) performed? The sentence tokens are meaningless; there is no meaning, if the meaning of a sentence is understood to be the congruence of the propositional and the illocutionary act, that can realistically be assigned to the sentence tokens of (24).

A linguistic model must capture two types of competence. Grammatical competence, the native speaker's knowledge of a language, is basically an IS A relationship. Rhetorical competence,

the native speaker's knowledge of how to use a language, is basically a COUNTS AS relationship. A performative analysis tends to obscure these two competences.

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